

they are important to people around the world, particularly to political prisoners who learn secondhand and thirdhand that some Senator in the United States of America mentioned their name or showed their photograph on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

It is hard to believe that this has any impact on history, but it does. Chris Homan on my staff has shown me over and over again that if I stand up and speak up and reach out to the embassies in these countries that are jailing their political prisoners, it can make a difference. And it does. Some of these prisoners, after years in prison, are finally, finally released. Many of them make it to the United States and come to my office in tears to thank me for a speech on the floor of the Senate.

It is hard to imagine in my station in life that anybody cares, but it does make a difference—certainly to them and their families, but often to the countries that are jailing them.

I would like to speak for a few minutes this morning about a few of these prisoners. Navalny, I have already mentioned. His fellow patriot Vladimir Kara-Murza remains jailed by Putin on nonsense charges and public fears of what they represent.

He came by my office. He had been poisoned by Russia and decided to go back and protest publicly. He knew what he was getting into, but his passion for principle is so overwhelming that he did it anyway. He sits in prison today as a symbol of freedom in a country where there is little or no freedom of expression—Vladimir Kara-Murza. I display these photographs just to make sure that you know they are real people and their families know that we are doing our best to keep their causes alive. Navalny has gone through living hell by Vladimir Putin and Russia.

Vladimir Kara-Murza was in my office—this man was—and told me he was headed back to Russia to get arrested again. Think about that as your life's mission: trying to change a country, change a leader, and fighting a dictatorship—and a bloodthirsty one at that.

We must not let Putin to prevail in Ukraine. I am saddened and angered that some of my colleagues in the U.S. Congress have grown tired of the cause of the Ukrainians in defeating Vladimir Putin and have decided they want to move on to other things. We cannot give up on our own values. The Ukrainians are fighting for our values today and dying in the process. To provide military assistance for them and encouragement is the least we can do for a country that is fighting for the same thing that we say inspired the United States' creation.

The next poster I will put up here is Belarus. In Belarus, we have the last dictator in Europe. His name is Lukashenko. He sold out his nation to Putin. There are more than 1,000 political prisoners, four of whom I want to mention.

This man, Ales Bialiatiski, is the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. He was jailed from 2011 to 2014. He came and visited me here at the Senate after he was released. Then he went back to Belarus and protested Lukashenko's dictatorial efforts and was jailed again. He has been in jail since 2021. He is not a young man. He has clearly devoted his life to freedom and is prepared to live in prison.

Opposition leader Sergei Tikhanovsky was jailed in 2020 for having the temerity to actually run an election against the dictator Lukashenko. I know his wife Svetlana Tikhanovsky. She ran in his place when he was arrested and probably won that election, but we will never know because of Lukashenko's distortion of the actual vote. Tikhanovsky's wife is living in Lithuania and traveling across Europe and the world to plead his cause and to plead the cause of the Belarusian people.

The two jailed Radio Free Europe journalists, Andrey Kuznechik and Ihar Losik, they, too, are paying the price for Lukashenko's dictatorial race. In 2020, millions of Belarusian voters turned out to vote for a better future, not the Soviet-era dystopia Lukashenko and Putin are trying to impose on their Ukrainian neighbors.

That is what this larger debate on the supplemental funding is all about. Will the United States stand on the side of these people who are risking their lives and giving their lives every day in prison to fight for democracy; or are we tired and want to move on to another subject?

I am not tired of democracy. I am here because of it.

It isn't just Vladimir Putin's orbit where we see this fight for democracy. In Cambodia, there is a glimmer of hope that new leadership can bring some change to the country's repressive history. An early move that new President Hun Manet can take in the direction of justice would be to release jailed human rights activist Theary Seng in Cambodia, who is serving a bogus 6-year sentence.

Last year, the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously passed an amendment which I offered barring any Cambodian official involved in her jailing from receiving or keeping a U.S. visa. The easiest way to lift that restriction is to release Theary Seng without any further delay.

And in Algeria, journalist and independent media owner Ihsane El Kadi, is serving a dubious 7-year sentence as part of a larger crackdown on free media and democracy. Such repression is a tragic setback to the country's vibrant free press that emerged after Algeria's terrible civil war. Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and the European Union are among those whom I join in calling for his immediate release.

Just a few weeks ago, we traveled with a congressional delegation led by Senator TIM Kaine of Virginia to Gua-

temala. And, finally, these cases I mention here came up during our visit—the troubling jailing of anti-corruption prosecutor Virginia Laparra and journalist Jose Ruben Zamora, Guatemala. Their incarceration occurred amid multiple efforts to derail the peaceful transition of power of the new President-elect Bernardo Arevalo.

January 14 may be just another day on the calendar here in Washington—a few days ahead—but it will be a major historic opportunity in Guatemala to finally bring to office a man who was duly elected President of that country.

We met with him. There was resistance to the transition, but we believe that he will prevail. He was the clear winner in that contest and should be given a chance to serve.

I am pleased to share that Ms. Laparra was just released from prison to house arrest. That is a movement in the right direction. It is a welcomed step. But we call for her full release and dropping of charges, as well as the immediate release of journalist Mr. Zamora.

What we do here matters around the world for the large and small battles occurring for freedom and democracy. I can only hope in the days ahead that someone, somehow, will get the message to the individuals that I have highlighted today, that they are not forgotten, that they do not languish in prison, unknown to the rest of the world.

We have to speak up for these people, for justice not only in the United States but justice around the world. And it makes a difference.

I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to look at the issue yourself, find those people who are unjustly imprisoned for political reasons in these autocratic regimes and give them a word of encouragement yourself on the floor of the Senate. Amazingly, it does make a difference. I have seen many released, and I hope to see more in the future. The time from us making these speeches, highlighting what they are going through, may seem like a waste of time to some, but it is not. It is a valuable investment in the values which we share with these amazing people around the world.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, 302,000—302,000—that is how many migrants U.S. Customs and Border Protection is reported to have encountered at our southern border in the month of December. One month—302,000.

To put that number in perspective, 302,000 is equivalent to roughly a third of the population of my home State of South Dakota or almost half of the population of Vermont or more than half—more than half, I should say, of the population of Wyoming. And that is just 1 month of encounters—1 month. Just when you think the Biden border crisis can't get any worse, it gets worse.

The situation at our southern border is unsustainable. We have got three successive recordbreaking years of illegal immigration at the southern border under President Biden, and if the current trend continues, we are well on our way to a fourth.

The Border Patrol is stretched thin. Border towns are stretched thin. Other major U.S. cities are struggling to deal with an influx of migrants.

Take New York City, for example. New York City is currently facing cuts to city services, including a massive 13.5 percent cut to its police force as a result of the migrant crisis. And while practical challenges posed by this immigration crisis are massive, even more worrisome are the national security challenges. Our country cannot be secure while we have hundreds of thousands of migrants flowing across our southern border each month, frequently to end up released into the United States with court dates years in the future.

Even more concerning are those who are making their way into our country without being apprehended. Since October 1 alone, there have been more than 83,000 known “got-aways” at our southern border. Those are individuals that the Border Patrol saw but was unable to apprehend. That is 83,000 individuals making their way into our country without our having the slightest idea of who they are, what they are doing here, or where in the United States they are planning to travel—83,000. And while some of them may simply be in search of a better life, others may be dangerous individuals who should not be entering our country.

Let’s be very clear. There are dangerous individuals who are trying to make their way into our country. Between October and November alone, the Border Patrol arrested 30 individuals on the Terrorist Watchlist attempting to make their way across our southern border. Fiscal year 2023 saw 169 individuals on the Terrorist Watchlist arrested at our southern border—169—a substantial increase, I might add, over fiscal year 2022, which itself was a substantial increase over fiscal year 2021. That is not a good trajectory.

Again, I point out, these numbers only refer to the individuals the Border Patrol actually apprehend. There were 670,000 known “got-aways” during fiscal year 2023. How many of them—how many of them were terrorists, criminals, or other dangerous individuals? The fact of the matter is: We don’t know. And that is disturbing.

This is insanity—the 169 they caught on the Terrorist Watchlist trying to come across our southern border and the 670,000 last year who came across the southern border who got away. We have no idea the composition of those people or how many of them. I suspect that most people who are trying to get in here who are terrorists or who are involved in some other type of criminal enterprise probably figure out a way to

get in here and not get caught. There may be quite a few of those on the “got-away” list.

What we know, however, is that we must regain operational control of the southern border, and it has to happen now. Since President Biden has failed to do so and since his policies have encouraged illegal immigration, Congress is going to have to act. We must act.

I am pleased the Democrats have finally come to the table in a real way to discuss needed reforms, but I want to say again that the only acceptable reforms are reforms that will actually meet the challenge at our southern border. Republicans will not sign off on cosmetic measures or superficial tweaks or simply just throwing more money at the problem. We owe the American people a secure border, and we will not agree to anything less than real reforms.

I have said this before—I have said it many times—that we are a nation of immigrants. I am one generation removed; my grandfather came here as an immigrant. Yet we are a nation of laws first and foremost. It is fundamental. It is the foundation. It is the bedrock principle that distinguishes our country from so many other countries around the world. We have laws, and they have to be followed. When people come to this country—and we are a welcoming country—they need to follow the law.

So fixing the problem means not just having additional funding for border security measures and enforcement personnel but a meaningful reform of our asylum and parole systems, which have been abused under the Biden administration.

A recent CBS News article noted:

Over the past few years . . . the U.S. asylum system has become a proxy process for migrants to stay and work in America, irrespective of whether they have valid claims or not.

That is not acceptable. Our asylum system is meant to be a refuge for those who face genuine danger from persecution. It is not meant to serve as temporary de facto amnesty for those who would simply prefer to live in the United States.

Our parole system is being abused as well. The Biden Department of Homeland Security’s overly permissive application of parole has allowed hundreds of thousands of individuals who have not been granted legal status and who may not have a case for remaining in the United States to take up residence in our country, once again providing de facto amnesty, even if temporary.

The Biden administration’s abuse of our asylum and parole systems has to be reined in if we hope to stem the tide of individuals flooding into the country, so any acceptable border security reform must include the reform of these systems.

While it may have taken them a long time to get here, I am, as I said, encouraged that at least Democrats have

finally come to the table, and I hope for the sake of our country that sooner rather than later we will arrive at an agreement. We have had 3 years of the Biden border crisis. Let’s make sure we don’t have a fourth.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

U.S. ATTORNEY’S OFFICE INVESTIGATIONS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I come to the Senate floor to respond to a series of accusations raised by the U.S. attorney of the Southern District of New York.

First, I would note that this is the second superseding indictment brought forth by the government. It should be noted that all of the information presented in the superseding indictments were fully available to the government since the beginning of this process and for at least a year prior to the bringing of this indictment, which, therefore, begs the question: Why did the government not proceed with all of these accusations from the beginning?

The answer is clear to me. By filing three indictments—one in late September, a second one a few weeks later in mid-October, and the third one just last week, in early January—it allows the government to keep the sensational story in the press. It poisons the jury pool, and it seeks to convict me in a court of public opinion. In so doing, the government’s tactics harm not just me but each of you, my colleagues, the political establishment, and, most importantly, the electorate of New Jersey.

The sensationalized allegations are now creating a rising call for my resignation, despite my innocence and before a single piece of evidence has even been introduced in a court of law. The U.S. Attorney’s Office has engaged not in a prosecution but a persecution. They seek a victory, not justice.

We have seen this play out with other prosecutions of public officers. Remember what happened to Senator Ted Stevens or Governor Bob McDonnell. There are numerous other examples. It is an unfortunate reality, but prosecutors sometimes shoot first before they even know all the facts. It would be a shame that this venerable body does the same.

So having set the stage for why this process has unfolded this way, let me deal with some of the issues, starting with the latest accusation.

I have received nothing—absolutely nothing—from the Government of Qatar or on behalf of the Government of Qatar to promote their image or their issues. The government’s principal allegation of what I supposedly